

IMPLEMENTATION AND IMPACT OF CAREER PATHWAYS IN MICHIGAN

FINAL PROJECT REPORT

**A project supported by the
Michigan Department of Career Development**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Career Pathways is a key strategy in the implementation of Michigan's Career Preparation System. Pathways help students make meaningful connections to six broad industry sectors that are reflective of the current and emerging world of work. Through their incorporation into the curriculum, Pathways help students examine their interests and learn through direct experience how school subjects relate to work. It is believed that this approach will help students select a career that suits them while acquiring the skills to help them succeed.

In collaboration with the Michigan Department of Career Development, a graduate class of the Michigan State University Public Policy and Administration Program prepared this study. It examines two questions:

1. How is Career Pathways being implemented by Michigan school districts?
2. What are the impacts of Career Pathways?

Research Methods

The research team gathered data and information through the following:

- Comprehensive review of literature concerning Career Pathways in the United States;
- Survey of 380 Michigan school districts' implementation of Career Pathways, of which 97 responded (26%); respondents did not include districts from metro Detroit;
- Review of school performance data from the Center for Educational Performance Information and Standard & Poors' School Evaluation Services;
- Case studies of three high schools implementing Career Pathways; and
- Analysis of 39 applications from districts receiving state grants to implement Career Pathways.

Key Findings

1. **Career Pathways growing in diverse manner.** Due to the widespread belief that our educational system does not fully prepare students for the world outside of school, school districts throughout Michigan and the United States are increasingly deploying the Career Pathways concept for organizing curricula. The manner of implementation is almost as varied as the number of schools adopting the concept, even when the state provides direction. Although Pathways are identified as a curricular approach, many districts implement career development activities that are supportive of Pathways but do not necessarily constitute curriculum change.
2. **More extensive implementation In Michigan than previously thought.** Career Pathways in Michigan is being implemented on a greater scale than originally thought. Of the 97 districts completing surveys, 86 indicated they were in the process of implementing Career Pathways, compared to the 17 districts MDCE had identified a year earlier as Career Pathways “implementers.” There was no significant difference in how the two groups -- the MDCE-identified “implementers” and the other survey respondents – were implementing Career Pathways.
3. **One general model of implementation.** Although Michigan school districts have flexibility within a set of state guidelines for Career Pathways, they appear to have coalesced around a general model of implementation. More than four-fifths of the districts use or intend to use all six basic pathways. The majority of school districts include the following components:
 - Educational Development Plans (EDPs)
 - Internships
 - Career Classes
 - Visits to Businesses
 - Job shadowing
 - Final Presentation
 - Graduation Requirement
 - Portfolios
 - Teacher Externships

The study showed Career Pathways catalyzed growth in the use of all of these components, particularly EDPs that increased from 35% to 80%.

4. **Uneven, not well defined integration of technical and academic curricula.** The majority (58%) of Career Pathway schools report integrating technical and academic curricula, yet the form of integration varies widely and needs additional explanation and verification.
5. **Most Pathways schools in partial implementation stage.** The majority of school districts studied (77%) have only partially implemented Career Pathways. This is due primarily to the fact that Career Pathways is only a few years old, with the greatest percentage of responding districts (22%) beginning implementation during the 1999-2000 school year. Additionally, the benchmarks require ample time and resources to reach full implementation.
6. **Too early to assess impact.** Inasmuch as most schools have only partially implemented Career Pathways, it is difficult to fully assess its impact and effectiveness. However, two-thirds of the districts studied have begun to collect outcomes data with which to evaluate

Career Pathways, such as attendance and graduation rates, EDPs, grade-point average, MEAP and ACT scores, college entrance rate and related job placement. While causality cannot be inferred, one-quarter of respondents reported slight gains in GPAs, attendance, graduation, and college entrance rates after implementing Career Pathways.

7. **Few structural changes resulting from Career Pathways.** The great majority of respondents (74%) reported no reorganization of staff due to Career Pathways, yet 37% of those reporting reorganization (10% of all respondents) indicated schools were breaking down departments into smaller units or sub-departments. Only 17% indicated that the school was remodeled (e.g. a career center) to facilitate Career Pathways.
8. **Career Pathways becoming reason for block scheduling.** Forty-four (44) percent of the 92 districts responding to this question, indicated their high schools used block scheduling, while 20% of 81 districts responded that their middle schools did. Almost one-third of schools reported as a result of Career Pathways they had changed their schedule, length of class session, school day or school year. Of the schools that made a change, 70% changed to a block type schedule.
9. **State funding critical.** The great majority of respondents (87%) reported receiving grant funds from the Michigan Department of Career Development –Career Prep funds or special Career Pathway Grant funds.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO MDCCD

1. **Keep the six pathways.** The researchers found that most school districts like the broadness of the six pathways so each student's career choice can easily fit into one of the pathways.
2. **Full-time coordinator.** A full-time contact person in the local district will speed the implementation process more than a part-time coordinator. This is based on the successful experience of one of the three case study districts and analysis of the grant applications.
3. **K-12 implementation of Career Preparation.** Implementation of Career Preparation throughout the district will provide continuity and focus the curriculum toward effective career choice and preparation for all students.
4. **Extend state funding.** To the extent the budget situation permits, allow districts to renew their one-year grants for 2-3 years. Most districts believe additional funds are needed to fully implement Career Pathways -- supply the needed materials and hire a full time coordinator. Along with additional and extended funding the state (MDCCD) should impose additional accountability measures, such as pre-determined indicators of success and trends found while implementing Career Pathways.
5. **Promote partnerships and networking.** Schools that have formed partnerships with outside parties (e.g. Workforce Development Boards, Chamber of Commerce, Intermediate School Districts, etc.) have had more success in implementing Career Pathways. Thus, MDCCD should continue to promote networking among school districts and various outside organizations. Such relationships and partnerships may result in additional resources for career development, to say nothing of contacts with local business that could help the schools with job shadowing, internships, teacher externships, and career fairs. Moreover, partnerships with employers and universities help ensure that school curricula within the pathway keep up with changing industry and postsecondary requirements.

6. **Regional Career Pathway advisory committees.** Analysis of grant applications and survey responses showing how some districts are promoting Career Pathways suggest that MDCD should encourage school districts in a workforce region to work with their Educational Advisory Groups (EAGs) to form industry-led advisory committees for each Career Pathway. Advisory committees would foster business and community input on issues such as future implementation and evaluation.
7. **Obtain support from faculty before implementing.** Districts that appear to be successful in implementing Career Pathways obtained a fair amount of consensus before going forward and before seeking grants to support it. Both teachers and counselors need professional development if consensus is to be obtained.
8. **Measurable benchmarks.** Responses to open-ended survey items persuaded the research team to recommend that MDCD continue to employ measurable benchmarks that must be met to receive or renew Career Prep and Career Pathways grants. Such benchmarks or standards provide districts a basic outline of the initiative while allowing some flexibility. Measurable benchmarks also allow for a more efficient evaluation of Career Pathways.
9. **Conduct similar study in 3-5 years to assess full implementation.** MDCD should perform a similar study in three to five years. This study found that the majority of schools districts have only partially implemented Career Pathways. It is difficult to assess an innovation that has not been fully implemented by most districts. A future study would enable MDCD to assess the impacts Career Pathways has had on students.
10. **Common evaluation measures using student-level data.** MDCD should evaluate the effectiveness of Career Pathways on the basis of statewide standards and common measures for all participating schools. The use of student level data is preferred over district wide data because student data can accommodate multiple career-related experiences that may or may not have been designated by a school as part of its Pathways initiative.
11. **Greater involvement of postsecondary education.** Answers to open-ended questions on several surveys suggest that more involvement of post-secondary institutions would help institutionalize Career Pathways. Michigan college or university applications might ask students to indicate their high school Career Pathway and explain their career goals. Moreover, new teachers should receive training in career preparation as part of their teacher preparation. Otherwise, school districts are forced to spend scarce professional development resources on training new teachers in this field.

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